ENGLISH / SPANISH FALSE FRIENDS: A SEMANTIC AND ETYMOLOGICAL APPROACH TO SOME POSSIBLE MISTRANSLATIONS

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Definition

As far as we know, there is not much written about false friends (Moss, 1992; Sabate Carrove y Chesnevar, 1998; Chamizo Domínguez, 1999; Chamizo Domínguez y Nerlich, 2002), perhaps due to the relatively incipient development of English/Spanish contrastive studies. In fact, false friends can only be studied within contrastive analysis.

To begin with, it seems ineluctable to define the term with which we are working. This task is not as easy as it may seem, since there is no general agreement on the concept and the terminology. Some scholars establish a distinction between the terms 'cognates', 'false cognates' and 'false friends' (Moss 1992: 142), whereas others only use 'cognates' to cover the three concepts (Dubois et al. 1992: 112). Even the same term can denote different ideas: while Alcaraz Varó and Martínez Linares (1997: 116) consider 'false friends' to have a common etymology, Crystal (1995: 421) and Chamizo Domínguez and Nerlich (2002: 1833) only take into account their spelling and meaning.

In this paper, we will adopt the theoretical basis of the latter researchers, which is also usually employed in this type of English/Spanish contrastive studies (Postigo Pinazo 1998, Sabate Carrove and Chesnevar 1998, Chamizo Domínguez 1999, Prado 2003). Thus, we consider that 'false friends' may be defined as those words of a language that are similar in form, but not in meaning, to some words of another language. Metaphorically speaking, false friends are (quasi-)homophones and (quasi-) homographs between two languages. Although slightly audacious, this statement reveals two aspects that –albeit obvious– are highly important:

1.- The existence of false friends implies the knowledge of two –or more– languages; that is the reason why a monolingual speaker will never have to face a false friend. This leads us to a controversial fact: the English spoken by a nonnative is different from that of a native. What nonnatives speak is an 'interlanguage', a new linguistic system that is neither English nor their mother tongue. This theory explains the existence of false friends, but is not innovative, since in 1972 Selinker coined the term 'interlanguage' to denote the linguistic system that learners build from the language input to which they have been exposed (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1994: 63).

Monolingual speakers tend to believe that their language is the only possible way of expressing reality; however, bilingual speakers have a wider perspective because they know two different ways of understanding the world. Obviously, acquiring a second language does not mean that the brain is divided in two sections; rather, it establishes links between both languages, so it needs a long time to avoid "undesirable interferences".

2.- On the other hand, concomitances between two languages imply at the same time some type of connection and difference. Otherwise, the confusion would not exist in the speaker's or the reader's mind. Thus, Spanish and Japanese are too distant in writing so as to present this linguistic problem, whereas Spanish and Italian –both Romance languages– share many false friends (Dittami, 1998).

1.2. Scope

As any linguistic issue, false friends can be studied from several points of view; therefore, it seems appropriate to present very briefly some general considerations that may be objects of study.

False friends greatly vary depending on the *user*. This means that teachers are highly unlikely to misinterpret some false friends, as they are so familiar with them that these words were assimilated with their actual meaning, leaving aside their possible mistranslation. Such is the case, for instance, of the English/Spanish pairs 'pie'-'*pie*', 'constipated'- '*constipado*', 'rape'-'*rape*' or 'embarrassed'-'*embarazada*'. However, for L2 students at elementary level those words are most likely to become false friends.

We may also classify false friends according to their *degree of similarity* with the other language's words. Thus, for a Spanish learner of English 'conductor', 'lecture' or 'eventual' are more likely to be mistranslated than 'college', 'jam' or 'discuss' due to the greater degree of graphic resemblance of the former.

Another distinction may be based on *phonetics* and *spelling*. Taking into account the great difference between the Spanish and the English sounds, it would be more difficult to provide examples of phonetic similarity; however, some of the following pairs of words present a remarkable resemblance when pronounced: 'matter' – 'mata'; 'dear' – 'día'; 'career' – 'quería'; 'I' – 'ay', 'hay'; 'yeah' – 'ya'; 'answer' (AmE) – 'ánsar'...

We could also pay attention to a more subtle distinction: the historical provenance of the terms. Departing from *etymology*, false friends may fall into two categories, according to Chamizo Domínguez y Nerlich (2002: 1836):

a) Semantic false friends: these pairs of words have the same etymological origin ('actual' – 'actual') and are usually known as 'cognates' (Dubois et al., 1992: 112).

b) Chance false friends: their similarity is by sheer chance ('bone' – 'bono').

Hence, whatever the approach adopted in cross-linguistic studies, it seems that false friends are not so rare in multilingual contexts; moreover, Moss (1992: 156) has demonstrated that they are "extremely frequently" found in specialised languages. That is the reason why research may be

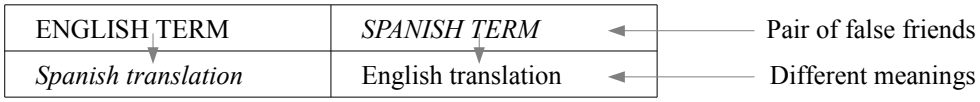
fruitful for language teaching and learning. In fact, some previous studies have shown that there is a need of specific training in false friends recognition (ibid.).

2. Purpose and methodology

This paper attempts to combine form and content, and consequently, etymology and semantics have been chosen as the framework of study. Thus, our paper is intended to offer an analysis of eleven examples of false friends shared between Spanish and English from a double perspective: their linguistic roots and meaning. The cases studied are an exploratory sample to illustrate the type of study which can be carried out in cross-linguistic analysis. Taking this contrastive approach as a starting point, we will try to present the differences between each pair of words and discover their possible relations in meaning, form and etymology. Whenever appropriate, we will also provide some examples taken from newspapers and magazines. Finally, we will establish a typology of false friends –according to our approach– which will allow us to reach some conclusions.

The methodology applied when analysing each false friend will take the following steps:

— Present a table containing the pair of false friends in capitals and their equivalents in English and Spanish below them, as in the following example:



In the translation cells, we will try to select the most usual meaning of each term. Synonyms will be separated by commas, whereas in cases of different meanings a slash will be used.

— Contrast the present English and Spanish meanings of the term, to establish the possible semantic differences or similarities;

— Contrast the English and Spanish etymology of the term, in order to understand the possible connections between both languages;

— Whenever appropriate, indicate the turning point in meaning, that is, the reason why or the moment when the semantic inequivalence between English and Spanish took place;

— Occasionally, comment on some Spanish mistranslations appearing on the press. The examples have been taken from present well-known newspapers –such as the *Herald Tribune* and *ABC*–, magazines –for example, *National Geographic*– and tourist leaflets. The examples in the body of the paper are referred to in brackets –for instance: (1)–, and can be found in the appendix.

For the semantic discussion, we have used *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (henceforth, NODE), the *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* (DRAE), compiled by the Real Academia de la Lengua Española, and the *Diccionario de uso del español actual Clave* (Clave). However, most of our comments about English words are based on the *Oxford Dictionary of English* (hereafter, ODE), considered one of the best sources on English etymology; and those related to the Spanish etymology, on the DRAE and the *Diccionario crítico etimológico castellano*

e hispánico by Corominas. Further sources have been consulted for referencing some false friends, and the complete list of dictionaries is located in the bibliography.

For the etymological derivation, we will classify the examples according to what is usually known as 'semantic change', which scholars have traditionally subdivided into the five following notions (Bréal, 1964: 99; Ullmann, 1967: 227-235; Lyons, 1996: 620): broadening, narrowing, pejoration, amelioration, and metaphorical transfer. For our purposes, we will pay particular attention to the two main aspects of semantic change:

a) changes in the range of meaning, that is to say, the extension, broadening or widening on the one hand, and the restriction or narrowing on the other; and

b) changes in evaluation of meaning, divided into negative development or pejoration, and positive or amelioration.

As regards the typographic conventions of our paper, we want to clarify the use of quotation marks. We will use single quotation marks (‘’) for introducing terms, and double ones (“”) when providing translations, definitions, and/or when reproducing other scholars' words. However, those double quotation marks will be omitted whenever the translation in given in brackets. Finally, expressions or terms in other languages than English will be italicised.

3. ANALYSIS

We will now analyse the eleven pairs of false friends. As they have been chosen at random –like in similar studies (Moss, 1992; Chamizo Domínguez y Nerlich, 2002)–, they will be presented alphabetically and classified afterwards. There are, however, two exceptions that will be discussed at the end due to their particular nature. Therefore, two main groups of false friends will be distinguished in our analysis: 1) false friends, arranged in alphabetical order; and 2) former false friends (no longer false friends), analysed in a second set.

3.1 FALSE FRIENDS

3.1.1 Beverage / *brebaje*

BEVERAGE	*BREBAJE*
Bebida	Concoction, potion

The semantic opposition between these two words is only partial, since both terms designate a drink. 'Beverage' is "a drink other than water", and its use is chiefly associated with commercial contexts (NODE, 1998: 168), as (1) shows: "alcoholic beverages". '*Brebaje*', on the contrary, has a pejorative nuance in Spanish (2), because it refers to a drink whose ingredients are "*desagradables al paladar*" (DRAE, 2001: 354). Furthermore, *Clave* adds that it may also present "*un mal aspecto*" (1996: 270).

Why this difference? If we resort to their etymological origin, we will see that it is common to both terms. The ODE and the DRAE explain that the term derives from Old French '*bevrage*' (in present day French, '*breuvage*'). According to the more detailed explanation that the OED offers (1978, vol. I: 837), 'beverage' was originally formed from the Latin verb '*bibĕre*' (to drink); to which the suffix '-age' was added.

We will have to conclude, then, that the Spanish word has undergone a mysterious, slight change of meaning with the passage of time; the same would be true of English, since in the OED the first sense of 'beverage' dates back to 1325, and is as follows: "drink, liquor for drinking; especially a liquor which constitutes a common article of consumption" (ibid.). Therefore, both languages have experienced a semantic change, the Spanish term resulting in a narrowing of the concept and the English one, in a widening or broadening.

However, Corominas clears up our doubts, at least those concerning '*brebaje*' (1984: 514). He agrees on the same etymological origin, and explains the spelling and lexical changes. The metathesis '*bre*' for '*bevr*' occurred in Spanish due to the influence of the word '*brebajo*', which denotes a mixture of water, flour and bran given to feed cattle. The similarity of the words '*brebajo*' and '*brebaje*' made the latter adopt the pejorative content of the former: notice the suffix '*-ajo*', always derogatory in Spanish, like in '*yerbajo*', '*espantajo*' or '*pingajo*'. The confusion led to a transference of the negative connotations, and thus, deriving into the present sense. Actually, nowadays '*brebajo*' has become a synonym of '*brebaje*' (DRAE, 2001: 354).

Therefore, semantically speaking, '*brebaje*' has suffered a pejoration of meaning with respect to its Latin origin, while the English false friend 'beverage' has not.

3.1.2. Comprehensive / *comprensivo*

COMPREHENSIVE	*COMPRENSIVO*
Muy amplio	Understanding / global

'Comprehensive' is a very misleading word for Spanish speakers due to its close similarity to '*comprensivo*', and also to '*comprehensivo*', the archaic spelling of the term. However, in a context like (3) we can easily infer that it does not mean '*comprensivo*' (4). A 'comprehensive' list "includes everything or nearly everything" (NODE, 1998: 378). Despite belonging to the same lexical family, the meaning of this term differs radically from others such as 'comprehend', 'comprehension' or 'comprehensible', all of them related to the idea of understanding or knowing something.

The reason for this semantic contradiction is found after conducting an etymological research. According to the OED (1978, II: 742-743) and the DRAE (2001: 607), both 'comprehensive' and '*comprensivo*' derive from the Latin verb '*comprehenděre*'. If we look into its evolution a bit further, we can discover that this verb was a compound, formed by the preposition *'cum'* (*con*) plus the verb '*apprehenděre*' (*coger* / *conquistar*). Hence, one meaning of '*comprehenděre*' is "to take with oneself", that is, "*coger*", "*apoderarse de*", as the Latin dictionary records (1990: 37; 95). However, in a metaphorical sense, when somebody understands a concept –another meaning of

‘*comprehendĕre*’ (*comprender*)–, they take it for themselves, they make it theirs, they grasp it, in a certain sense.

Therefore, ‘comprehensive’, unlike the rest of its lexical family, keeps only the first meaning and modifies it by adding the idea of completion. Spanish, on its part, rarely uses the second meaning (DRAE, 2001: 607): “*que comprende, contiene o incluye*”, which is close to the English one, but implies neither the vast majority nor the whole quantity (Torrents dels Prats, 1989: 126-127).

3.1.3. Depart / *departir*

DEPART	*DEPARTIR*
Partir	To converse

Although both words belong to a formal register, their meaning is completely different: ‘to depart’ means “leave, typically in order to start a journey” (NODE, 1998: 494), such as in (5); however, ‘*departir*’ means “*hablar, conversar*” (6) (DRAE, 2001: 748).

Curiously enough, the etymological research reveals that the two words –which have nothing in common in terms of semantics– share the same origin. The DRAE (2001: 748) and the OED (1978, III: 204) record the Latin verb ‘*partĭre*’ (to divide), to which the prefix ‘*dis*-’ was added, forming the verb ‘*dispertĭre*’. This common Latin origin suggests that the semantic opposition could be cleared up by consulting a Latin dictionary. The verb ‘*partĭre*’ comes from the third declension noun ‘*pars, partis*’, whose basic meaning is “*parte, porción*”. However, this verb may also mean “*partido, bando, facción*”, as well as “*lugar, región*” (Vox, 1990: 352). Consequently, the polysemous nature of ‘*pars*’ –the pristine component of ‘*dispertĭre*’– is the element bridging the gap between the Spanish and the English senses. Thus, ‘to depart’ is “to divide places”, that is, to leave a place to go to another place. On the other hand, ‘*departir*’ means “side, camp”; and indeed, a conversation may be metaphorically interpreted as going from one side to another: the speaker becomes the hearer, the ideas are expressed and understood, and viceversa. This is our personal interpretation, based on a Latin dictionary; nevertheless, we must let the experts speak. In their dictionary, Pastor and Roberts (1996: 132) explain how ‘**per*(*d*)’ (*asignar, otorgar*) may be the Indoeuropean root of the Latin word ‘*pars*’, which is, in turn, the origin of ‘*departir*’. The archaic meaning of this verb, “*dividir*”, was replaced by another sense, “*explicar menudamente*”, which also disappeared, making the word eventually change its meaning to denote what it means nowadays, “*conversar*”.

Thus, it is curious to discover how speakers of a language “model” a term: both are descended from the same Latin root –and, consequently, from the same meaning. However, users have made them become apart in semantic terms and, hence, become false friends.

3.1.4. Honest / *Honesto*

HONEST	*HONESTO*
Sincero, honrado, honesto	Decent / honest

These two words are context-dependent false friends. The NODE lists three meanings of 'honest' (1998: 879): two of them can be translated by '*honesto*', while the third one –"frank, sincere and direct"– cannot, as (7) shows. An appropriate translation into Spanish for (7) should begin "Para ser sincera...". However, a person who tells the truth and does not cheat or steal –that is, an honest person– in Spanish may be called '*proba*', '*íntegra*', '*recta*', '*honrada*' or '*honesta*'. Thus, the regrettable passing of a radio-anchorman was reported with the following headline: "*Desaparece un periodista honesto*" (8). This sense is the last recorded by the DRAE (2001: 1226).

Nevertheless, up to a several decades ago[1], '*honesto*' and '*honrado*' were not synonyms, as Lázaro Carreter explains (1997: 563). "*La omnímoda vigencia de la honestidad*" (ibid.: 562) has put an end to the former distinction:

> *[...] definían los académicos dieciochescos el primer concepto [honradez]: "Aquel género de pundonor que obliga al hombre de bien a obrar siempre conforme a sus obligaciones, y cumplir la palabra en todo". Y el segundo [honestidad]: "moderación y pureza contraria al pecado de la lujuria" (ibid.).*

According to some studies, the distinction began to become blurred in the first half of the 20th century (Lorenzo, 1996: 520). Salvador de Madariaga gave us one of the wittiest and clearest distinctive definitions (1970, quoted in Torrents dels Prats, 1989: 309):

> *Y no hablemos del omnipresente 'honesto' por 'honrado', traducción del inglés* honest*, pero mala traducción; ya que en español, si se me perdona una definición somera y algo cínica, la honradez es la conducta limpia de la cintura para arriba, y la honestidad lo es de cintura para abajo.*

And what could be the reason for such a change? Again, it is Lázaro Carreter who suggests a possible explanation of this semantic alteration: "*[...] en el plenario influjo de éste* [el inglés] *hay que buscar la causa de la confusión*" (1997: 563). The same foreign influence is also believed by other scholars to have been the cause of that semantic evolution (Torrents del Prats, 1989: 308; Lorenzo, 1996: 521). For Lorenzo, even the French word '*honnête*' could have something to do (1996: 521).

Etymologically, the meaning is also confusing. Both '*honest*' and '*honesto*' come from the Latin '*honestus*', a word that combined the meanings of '*honrado*' and '*honesto*': "*honorable; honrado, conforme a la moral, virtuoso*" (Vox, 1990: 224). In fact, this confusion was also present in English, since in the beginning 'honest' was related to either honour or, when applied to women, virtue and chastity (OED, 1978, V: 361-362). In the 18th century, these meanings gradually became obsolete in favour of another sense, which is the current one nowadays.

1 Indeed, the 1869 edition of the DRAE is the first to record "*honrado*" as one of the meanings of '*honesto*' (http://buscon.rae.es/ntlle/SrvltGUIMenuNtlle?cmd=Lema&sec=1.0.0.0.0.).

Therefore, 'honest' may be translated as '*honesto*' whenever it does not mean "*sincere, frank, or open*"; in that case, '*franco*' and '*claro*' are the only options recommended by *Clave*. The useful distinction, also suggested by Seco (1998: 248), can be seen in example (9). Yet, this semantic distinction is nowadays being blurred, so 'honest' and '*honesto*' seem to be driven to become a 'translation pair', that is, equivalents. This evolution might be due to the partial nature of false friend between the two words –as they are context-dependent false friends– and the use adopted by Spanish speakers, but this explanation remains controversial and should be further studied.

3.1.5. Luxurious / *Lujurioso*

LUXURIOUS	*LUJURIOSO*
Lujoso, honrado, honesto	Lustful

While 'luxurious' refers to "extremely comfortable, elegant, or enjoyable, especially in a way that involves great expense" (NODE, 1998: 1103), '*lujurioso*' means something quite different, because it is related to '*lujuria*', a vice concerning "*deleites carnales*" (DRAE, 2001: 1403), that is, lust (10). Some semantic similarity might be found in the following subsense of 'luxurious': "giving self-indulgent or sensual pleasure" (NODE, 1998: 1103). However, translating '*lujurioso*' for 'luxurious' could be as easy as dangerous. To take a case in point, consider example (11): the mistranslation would be outrageous, and may result in a very embarrassing situation.

Nonetheless, 'luxurious' and '*lujurioso*' were synonyms in previous times. More specifically, the OED (1978, VI: 520) records two obsolete meanings of 'luxurious' that vividly evoke the idea of 'lustful': "lascivious, lecherous" and "passionately desirous after something". Both of those meanings were first recorded in the 14th century, and began to disappear in the second half of the 17th century. By this time, the term started to be used in a new sense when referring to things: "of or pertaining to luxury, characterized by or making a display of luxury". Regarding the relationship between the English terms 'luxurious' and 'lustful', they were only synonyms for one century because 'lustful' had no explicit sexual connotations up to the end of the 16th century and was merely used to denote "excessive desire" (OED, 1978, VI: 513).

Back to the pair of false friends, the polysemy was already present in their common Latin origin, '*luxus, -us*' (Vox, 1990: 286), where three meanings were confused: "*exuberancia*", "*lujo*" and "*desenfreno*". Again, Pastor and Roberts offer a deeper and better explanation (1996: 98): the basic meaning of '*luxus*' was "*exceso*", and it derived from the Indoeuropean root '**leug-*', which meant "*girar, doblar*".

Therefore, Spanish, unlike Latin, clearly differentiates those two ideas through two words, '*lujoso*' and '*lujurioso*' adopting the negative moral sense. English, however, expressed both senses with one word ('luxurious') up to three centuries ago. Then, 'lustful' and 'luxurious' began to denote different concepts, and 'luxurious' underwent an amelioriation.

3.1.6. Remove / *Remover*

REMOVE	*REMOVER*
Quitar, retirar	To stir

Traditionally considered as false friends, 'remove' and '*remover*' share the idea of a change of place: "to take away (something unwanted or unnecessary) from the position it occupies" (NODE, 1998: 1570); "*pasar o mudar una cosa de un lugar a otro*" (DRAE, 2001: 1943). Yet, 'remover' is rarely used with that meaning. *Clave* exemplifies a very curious southern usage of the term in the sentence "*El ministro fue removido a causa de los incidentes ocurridos*", where the participle means "*sustituido*" (1996: 1578). As a matter of fact, corpus-based dictionaries record three senses related to the notion of taking away, moving out or eliminating something or somebody (Seco, Andrés y Ramos, 1999, II: 3892).

However, most of the times '*remover*' means "*mover una cosa, agitándola o dándole vueltas, generalmente para que sus componentes se mezclen*" (12), which is the second meaning the DRAE records (2001: 1943). In this sense, 'remove' is a false friend, because it does not mean "to stir" (trying to apply that meaning to (13) would result in a disaster, particularly for the infected person stirring the nits, instead of removing them). But a few centuries ago –until 1601, which is the last reference reported–, 'to remove' was not a false friend of '*remover*', since as the OED indicates, it did mean "to move, to stir; to be in motion" (1978, VIII: 437).

Therefore, in this case, the origin –the Latin verb '*movere*' (*mover*) plus the prefix '*re-*'– is not responsible for the ulterior semantic changes. Rather, this is a good example of how language evolves through time, in this case narrowing the English concept. Diachronic Linguistics may go into the causes of this semantic evolution in depth.

3.1.7. Rise / *Risa*

RISE	*RISA*
Subida	Laugh

Greater opposition between both words cannot exist, not only in terms of meaning [see (14) and (15)], but also etymologically speaking. In this case, definitions are obviated because of their lack of relevance. As regards the origin, the OED considers Common Teutonic the language from which Old English received '*risan*', term that was usually substituted by '*arisan*' (to arise), with the exception of Early Middle English northern dialects (1978, VIII: 708 709). '*Risa*', on the other hand, comes from Latin '*risus*', the past participle of '*rideo*': "*reír, sonreír*" (Vox, 1990: 442, 439).

Hence, 'rise' and '*risa*' are merely chance false friends and consequently they are not cognates.

3.1.8. Signature / *Signatura*

SIGNATURE	*SIGNATURA*
Firma	Call number

The word 'signature' is not a synonym of '*signatura*', since its main sense refers to "a person's name written in a distinctive way as a form of identification in authorising a cheque or document or concluding a letter" (16) (NODE, 1998: 1732), nothing to do with a code attached to books or documents in libraries (17) (Seco, Andrés y Ramos, 1999: 4111; DRAE, 2001: 2063).

Nonetheless, there seems to be a possible semantic resemblance between this pair of words in their secondary meanings. Thus, the DRAE lists (2001: 2063) three meanings of '*signatura*' related to the idea of a mark or a signal that identifies something. A similar idea may certainly be found in one of the subsenses recorded by the English dictionary: "a distinctive pattern, product or characteristic by which someone or something can be identified" (NODE, 1998: 1732).

It is not difficult to imagine that two words that are so similar in terms of spelling and that share some semantic shades of meaning derive from the same Latin origin. Again, the OED offers more details about the etymology: 'signature' comes from the verb '*signāre*' (to mark, to sign), through either the French '*signature*' or the Medieval Latin '*signatura*' (1978, IX: 35). Again, a polysemous etymological root has permitted English to adopt one meaning and Spanish to keep another one. Therefore, Spanish chose '*firma*', also coming from Latin, to express the concept of English 'signature'. Paradoxically, the Spanish terms '*signar*' and '*signatario*', which belong to the lexical family of the false friend, do express the idea of writing one's name (DRAE, 2001: 2063).

And, curiously, another false friend arises: '*firma*' / 'firm'. This pair of words shows the increasing influence of the English language, which has led the DRAE to accept the calque '*firma*' (18) as a synonym of '*empresa*' (19). Examples in newspapers are abundant, especially when referring to international firms: in (19) Renault and Nissan are alternatively called '*firmas*' and '*empresas*'.

Perhaps a metonymy is responsible for the meaning of 'firm', and its Spanish equivalent '*firma*': the director's name (*firma*) represents the firm (*empresa*). We cannot forget that 'firm', coming from '*firmāre*' (to confirm) was a synonym of 'signature' for over a century; it was in the second half of the 18th century when its meaning changed (OED, 1978, IV: 247). The relationship between these two pairs of words is so close that '*firma*' is often used with the second meaning of 'signature'. *Clave* exemplifies this usage: "*Esta película lleva la 'firma' de su director*" (1996: 824).

3.1.9. Success / *Suceso*

SUCCESS	*SUCESO*
Éxito	Event / crime report

It is surprisingly helpful to consult a dictionary before expressing categorical opinions about linguistic questions, even those related to our mother tongue. Otherwise, we will be astonished to find in the DRAE (2001: 2102), for example, that '*suceso*' may have a positive nuance ("*éxito, resultado, término de un negocio*") apart from the negative one ("*hecho delictivo o accidente desgraciado*") (20). As a matter of fact, these are the last meanings the dictionary provides for the word, but they do exist. Indeed, in (21) 'success' may be translated as '*suceso*', according to the first definition; however, as Torrents dels Prats points out (1989: 598), that sense is hardly used today.

The reason of this apparent semantic contradiction –how can any term express a positive or a negative meaning at the same time?– lies in the Latin origin of this pair of words. Both come from '*successus*' –the English term still keeps the double consonants–, from the verb '*succĕdĕre*'. The OED considers it a synonym of 'to succeed', but the Latin dictionary is more accurate: "*llegar a término, especialmente terminar favorablemente*" (Vox, 1990: 486). Then, although there may be positive nuances in the verb –maybe due to the influence of another of its senses, "*subir, escalar*"– this is not always the case; especially once we know that '*succĕdĕre*' is a compound formed by the verb '*cedĕre*', one of whose meanings is "*ir a parar, pasar a*" (ibid.: 71), and the prefix '*sub-*', which here means "*después de*" (ibid.: 481).

Etymologically, therefore, '*succĕdĕre*' merely indicates factual succession. And that is exactly what 'success' meant up to one or two centuries ago. Thus, the OED first records the following meaning, which became obsolete in 1731 (1978, X: 76-77): "That which happens in the sequel; the termination (favourable or otherwise) of affairs". Just a few lines below, we find another archaic definition (last recorded in 1839), even more illustrative than the former one: "The fortune (good or bad) befalling anybody in a particular situation or affair. Usually with qualifying adjective: good s. = sense 3; ill s. = failure". And what does sense 3 (first recorded in 1586) say? "(The older good success) The prosperous achievement of something attempted". Hence, it is clear that the word 'success' has suffered what we could call a semantic meliorative process, whose origin might lie in the positive connotations that '*succĕdĕre*' could convey. Still, in present day English we find some derivatives of 'success' that only express a temporal relationship: 'succession' and 'succeeding' [see (22)] are two examples. On the contrary, Spanish has preferred to leave them out and provide the most frequent meaning with a somewhat neutral tone: "*cosa que sucede, especialmente cuando es de alguna importancia*" (DRAE, 2001: 2102).

3.2. FORMER FALSE FRIENDS

The last two pairs of words we are going to examine are particularly interesting. This is so because their meaning was modified in the last edition of the DRAE (22nd, 2001) and new meanings were added that, until then, had been severely criticised. In fact, although some important corpus-based dictionaries recorded this angloid usage in the mid and late 90s, some well-known scholars did not approve of its correctness (Lorenzo, 1996; Lázaro Carreter, 1997). Despite no longer being false friends, we want to comment on them because of this debatable similar nature.

3.2.1. Ignore / *Ignorar*

IGNORE	*IGNORAR*
Not to know	No hacer caso

Until very recently, 'to ignore' was not considered an equivalent of the Spanish verb '*ignorar*'. In fact, the DRAE recorded the sense "*no hacer caso de algo o de alguien*" in the 2001 edition. Originally 'to ignore' and '*ignorar*' were equivalents, since both words come from Latin '*ignorāre*' (OED, 1978, V: 33; DRAE, 2001: 1247), a verb formed by adding the negative prefix '*in-*' to the root '*gno*' (to know). But eventually, 'to ignore' meant "to refuse take notice of, recognise, to disregard to not to intentionally, leave out of account or consideration, shut 'one's eyes to", like in (23). The OED dates this sense for the first time in 1801 (1978, I: 33).

Nevertheless, the use of '*ignorar*' was restricted to denote the things that one does not know, for instance in (24): something that has not happened –notice the verbal form '*habrá*'– is unknown, so it is '*ignorado*'. Unfortunately, journalists seem to have forgotten or –shall we joke about it?– ignore their own mother tongue, and they write sentences like (25), where the verb '*decidir*' adds that English nuance of 'voluntary ignorance'. This sense of the word is so widely used that the most important Spanish dictionaries of usage, *María Moliner* and *Clave*, recorded it some years ago (1998, vol. II: 13; 1996: 971). The Anglicism is not new, since Fernando Lázaro Carreter, in an article published in 1984, labelled it as "*un flagrante caso de barbarismo superfluo*" (1997: 316). Despite its length, due to the relevance of the content and the author, we consider it appropriate to reproduce a whole paragraph, taken from *El dardo en la palabra* (ibid.: 315-316):

> *Ignorar [...] significa: "no saber una o muchas cosas, o no tener noticia de ellas". [...] sólo eso ha significado tal verbo desde el siglo XV, en que, como latinismo, se insertó en nuestra lengua [...]. En modo alguno hacer como si no existiera [...]. Para entender estas novísimas ignorancias hay que recurrir a un diccionario de inglés. El Webster, por ejemplo, informa de que en dicha lengua 'to ignore', en su acepción de "carecer de cierto conocimiento", es ya arcaico, porque ahora significa "negarse a tener noticia de algo", "cerrar los ojos a algo". O, dicho en romance, "no hacer caso". [...] Si esto no se ataja –y no se ve medio– será preciso echar mano de diccionarios ingleses para leer prosa castellana.*

Emilio Lorenzo agrees with Lázaro Carreter that '*ignorar*', in this new sense, is an unnecessary semantic calque (1996: 521). In Spanish there are numerous expressions to verbalise this same idea: *'desoír', 'no hacer caso', 'desatender', 'prescindir de', 'ningunear', 'hacer caso omiso', 'pasar por alto', 'no darse por enterado', 'dejar de lado',* and *'soslayar'*; and in informal register, we could even use *'pasar de', 'saltarse (una norma)'*, etc. Finally, we cannot help mentioning the singular option suggested by Martín Descalzo (quoted in Lorenzo, 1996: 522): '*desimportar*'.

Still, today the use of '*ignorar*' meaning 'to ignore' is more and more common than any of its mentioned alternative linguistic expressions. Moreover, this new sense may be more frequently found than the older one.

3.2.2. Nominate / *Nominar*

NOMINATE	*NOMINAR*
Proponer, designar	To name

Again, let us draw attention to what the former director of the *Real Academia de la Lengua Española* (RAE) commented (Lázaro Carreter, 1997: 386):

> Nominar *significa en español sólo la acción de poner nombre [...]; pero* to nominate *posee en inglés más significados. El primero que se nos encajó fue el de "proclamar candidato" (para un Oscar; a la Presidencia de los Estados Unidos, etcétera).*

'*Nominar*' meaning 'to nominate' is another Anglicism that we can read and hear everywhere, especially in the Oscar Awards Ceremony and in the reality show Big Brother (26). Having words which may express the same idea –such as *'proponer', 'designar'* and *'candidatura'*–, the Spanish language does not need the barbarism '*nominar*'; (27) is a perfect example to illustrate this Anglicism, very common in the Spanish journalistic jargon (ibid.: 386).

The reason for the Anglicism may be etymological, because both verbs come from the Latin '*nominãre*'. This word had two general meanings: 1) to name, to call, to mention; and 2) to propose, to designate (Vox, 1990: 325). Hence, '*nominãre*', being a polysemous term, "lent" Spanish the first sense, while the second one was kept by English. At first, however, 'to nominate' also meant "to call" and "to provide with a name" (OED, 1978, VII: 185); both senses are obsolete nowadays.

However, the 2001 edition of the DRAE records this Anglosaxon influence under the second and third senses of '*nominar*': *"designar a alguien para un cargo o cometido"* and *"presentar o proponer a alguien para un premio"*. For some scholars (Seco, 1998: 309; Lorenzo, 1996: 530; Torrents del Prats, 1989: 414-415), this is another Anglicism, another unnecessary calque; especially if we take into account that there is a great number of linguistic possibilities to express the same concept: *'proponer', 'seleccionar', 'presentar', 'proclamar candidato', 'designar'...* Yet, the new senses are actually much more frequent than the older one, today rarely used.

4. DISCUSSION

We have attempted to discover the etymological reasons of the semantic similarities and differences of eleven false friends, and, occasionally, present the possible consequences that the ignorance of these misleading terms may have. Our contrastive analysis, albeit based on an extremely limited corpus of examples, allows us to validate the ***typology*** of English/Spanish false friends suggested by Chamizo Domínguez and Nerlich (2002):

a) ***chance false friends:*** occasional pairs of words which have nothing in common in terms of etymology;

b) ***semantic false friends or cognates:*** the vast majority of these pairs, which share the same etymological origin.

However, we would like to add a third type of false friends:

c) ***former false friends:*** they were false friends, but language users have slowly made them become translation pairs, especially in some particular contexts.

Within a) we only include 'rise', a term whose similarity with '*risa*' is by sheer chance. With regard to b) and c), we refer the reader to Table 1, which shows the most relevant data of our analysis concerning the etymology of the words and the semantic changes from their respective origins.

SEMANTIC FALSE FRIENDS	**SEMANTIC CHANGE**	**ORIGIN**
BEVERAGE	Narrowing	Latin
BREVAJE	Narrowing and pejoration	***Bibĕre***
COMPREHENSIVE	Loss of polysemy	Latin
COMPRENSIVO	Slight semantic change, but still polysemous	***Comprehendĕre***
DEPART	Loss of polysemy	Latin
DEPARTIR	Loss of polysemy	***Dispertĭre***
HONEST	Slight shift of denotation	Latin
HONESTO	Semantic narrowing, now disappearing	***Honestus***
LUXURIOUS	Meliorative loss of polysemy	Latin
LUJURIOSO	Pejorative loss of polysemy	***Luxus***
REMOVE	Remains the same	Latin
REMOVER	Semantic narrowing in usage	***Removĕre***
SIGNATURE	Loss of polysemy	Latin
SIGNATURA	Loss of polysemy	***Signatūra***
SUCCESS	Meliorative narrowing of meaning	Latin
SUCESO	Context-dependent nuances, most usually pejorative	***Succĕdĕre***
IGNORE	Semantic narrowing	Latin
IGNORAR	Semantic broadening	***Ignorāre***
NOMINATE	Loss of polysemy	Latin
NOMINAR	Semantic broadening	***Nomināre***

Table 1. Semantic change in the semantic false friends and former false friends studied

In the two cases of former false friends, there seems to be a constant: the 'false friendship' disappeared due to the semantic evolution of the Spanish term. English is today the lingua franca, so Spanish users sometimes adopt certain English shades of meaning and incorporate them into their mother tongue, thus blurring the boundaries of some false friends. This is happening with the pair 'honest'-'*honesto*', whose semantic assimilation is probably dramatically reducing the frequency of use of the word '*honrado*'.

Obviously, the most important limitation of our analysis is the small number of pairs of words; yet, we think that the study may lead to some specific conclusions, which can be summarised as follows:

— all the semantic false friends come from Latin;

— considering that a great part of the Spanish lexicon also comes from Latin, it is easy to understand why those English terms are so misleading for a Spanish native speaker;

— most of the words are partial false friends, that is, either they are context-dependent false friends ('honest', 'remove', 'success') or they convey, at least, a common idea. This latter case usually occurs when the passing of time has either introduced a new nuance ('beverage', 'ignore') or removed a former polysemy ('comprehensive', 'nominate', 'signature', 'luxurious').

— some words, such as 'to depart' and '*departir*', denote totally different actions in English and Spanish.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Moving on towards more general reflections, we may argue that this semantic evolution seems to show the independence that each language has. In the beginning both Spanish and English had "selected" the same meanings for words having the same origin; however, that initial synonymy began to diverge, and, as a result, some terms are nowadays either equivalents only in certain contexts or absolute false friends.

This idea may be interpreted as an argument proving: a) a language, any language, is a worldview, or, to put it in German terms, a '*Weltanschauung*'; and b) that view is dynamic, so it may change through time. Language is much more than a mere collection of grammatical patterns and lists of words. Learning a language is learning a culture. Each language has its "individuality", which must be respected. Clearly, we are not so purist so as to overlook the cultural enrichment and the broadminded perspective that an interlinguistic contact may produce, but never ignoring the particular features of language. Languages in contact produce a linguistic interchange, and that is certainly "healthy" for both languages, because they can benefit from a different worldview which may broaden or simply change their own: for instance, think of the introduction of the 'siesta' in the Anglosaxon world. On the contrary, unnecessary lexical borrowings may have negative effects on a language and its culture. In other words: languages change because their users must change to adapt to the constantly changing world; however, part of this ever-shifting nature can and should be controlled in order not to lose the essence of the speaking community. In short, rules cannot be altered if not previously known.

Let us give an example: the norms of the Spanish language have been controlled by the RAE since its foundation in 1713. From that date on, this academy has periodically published an edition of the normative DRAE. This dictionary has literally legal force, since the Spanish judges sometimes resort to them before pronouncing sentence. This fact confers Spanish a conservative nature. However, the English language, without any similar regulatory institution, is constantly changing the usage of its words and creating new terms everyday.

Consequently, it seems appropriate to show the importance that false friends may have. Living as we are in a world linguistically governed by English –notice this is the international auxiliary language, the current lingua franca– we, as nonnative speakers of English, should have a more than acceptable command of it. Notwithstanding, the Spanish language must also be deeply studied at

Spanish schools. Otherwise, we will not be able to know whether a sentence is grammatically correct or not; actually, this is already happening: mistranslations and Anglicisms are often found in the media and, by imitation, they are also transferred into casual speech. And when a country begins to lose some part of its language, it also begins to lose some part of its culture. Do we really want to lose our culture? Then, we should go ahead and abide by the consequences. Personally, we do not believe this is the most desirable option.

Also of note, our exploratory analysis reveals that part of the Latin, English and Spanish lexicon appears to have in common much more than might be thought, despite their obvious and more numerous differences. Thus, the knowledge of Latin seems to be useful for the Spanish learner of English. Without that classical linguistic basis, certain English words are very likely to become false friends. We do not suggest that undergraduates should require an advanced command of etymology, but they would certainly benefit from some intermediate philological knowledge of that kind. Further, warning Spanish students against certain false friends by comparing their linguistic origins and semantic evolution might be an interesting teaching experience at upper undergraduate levels. Thus, students would become more aware of the differences and, perhaps, they would be less likely to make mistakes. We think that those pedagogical implications make this approach worth trying. Fernando A. Navarro (2002) shows how teaching etymology can certainly be as enjoyable as educational. His book may be a starting point or at least a reference to keep in mind to develop a teaching methodology of etymology.

Therefore, we agree with Moss (1992: 156) and Chamizo Domínguez y Nerlich (2002: 1847) when they argue that false friends are a relevant linguistic topic because their study has important implications in several areas:

- Translation Studies may benefit from the research in false friends so that translators may be able to overcome those pitfalls;
- ESP syllabuses may include a specific section devoted to false friends recognition. More particularly, this idea should be emphasised in the study of sci-tech language as great part of its lexicon is derived from Latin roots;
- Second language teaching should also take advantage of this type of analyses in order to make students aware of the semantic differences underlying certain spelling similarities; thus, a number of basic mistakes could be avoided;
- If media professionals were more conscious of these semantic differences and knew the Spanish equivalents for some English false friends, they would surely be more unlikely to use Anglicisms. Taking into account the powerful influence of mass media in our society, this is a major point.
- Consequently, the whole Spanish speaking community would become less prone to use Spanish words 'in the Anglosaxon way'. Thus, the Spanish language would no longer deserve the label '*castellanqui*' that Salvador de Madariaga applied to it (quoted in Torrents dels Prats, 1989: 7).

Therefore, we hope that this paper has shown and warned against some of the consequences that might derive from the ignorance of the languages we use.

Corpus of examples

(1) Both restaurants are licensed to serve alcoholic *beverages* only when accompanying a meal.

(2) Lo mismo se puede decir del vino de palma, un popular y letal *brebaje* africano.

(3) Superb dinner menu and fully *comprehensive* wine list.

(4) Su padre, Gerard, la luminaria más deslumbrante del cine francés, se ha mostrado siempre *comprensivo* con los traspiés de su retoño.

(5) All scheduled cruises *depart* from either Temple or Charing Cross Pier on Victoria Embankment.

(6) Acudieron figuras como el ex ciclista Miguel Induráin, que tuvo ocasión de *departir* con Fernando Alonso.

(7) To be *honest*, I wouldn't be happy because I don't want no kids.

(8) Desaparece un periodista *honesto*.

(9) ... tenemos que ser *francos* y admitir que el euro no nos garantizará el éxito económico sin un proceso firme y sostenido de reformas económicas.

(10) El Kamasutra se ha convertido en un libro picante, *lujurioso*, incluso pornográfico e inmoral.

(11) ...the elegant settings of Bateaux London's *luxurious* restaurant cruisers on the River Thames.

(12) Hervir suavemente sin dejar de *remover* el arroz.

(13) ... the most venerable treatment for head lice: *removing* the eggs, or nits, by hand, having first drowned them in a shampoo of olive oil.

(14) These human towers can *rise* higher than small apartment buildings.

(15) Pero dejó para el recuerdo una broma que provocó un ataque de *risa* a los espectadores y, en especial, al suizo.

(16) But the *signature* is fairly legible and is identical to Wasson's co-signature on the Rice setter.

(17) El volumen contiene 1.581 fichas de los procesos eclesiásticos de ese periodo, en las que se señala el número del proceso, la datación, lugar, contenido, *signatura* y detallados índices cronológicos, topográficos, onomásticos y de materias.

(18) Big *Firm's* Failure Rattles Japan.

(19) ...indicó el director general de la *firma* francesa, Louis Schweiter. [...] La recién estrenada alianza entre Nissan Motor, segunda *empresa* japonesa de automóviles, y la francesa Renault [...] Los responsables máximos de ambas *empresas*, [...] anunciaban la adquisición por parte de Renault del 36'8% del capital de la *firma* nipona.

(20) El peor parado en el *suceso* fue, sin duda, el único tripulante de trimarán que acabó siendo arrollado por el barco.

(21) The *success* of Carlos Tusquets' bank, Fibanc, shows *seny* at work in everyday life.

(22) In *succeeding* days we found dozens more pitiful corpses curled into cracks or laid out on high rocky pallets.

(23) The mosquito *ignores* the eggs [...] and goes off to employ subterfuges of her own.

(24) El derrotado sabe que todo ha concluido, pero el asediado *ignora* cuánto más habrá de sufrir.

(25) La realidad demuestra que es muy poco rentable que la empresa decida *ignorar* los problemas medioambientales.

(26) The first two "Lord of the Rings" flicks - 2001's "The Fellowship of the Ring" and 2002's "The Two Towers" - were *nominated* for the top Oscar but lost.

(27) Japón, desde que se creó la categoría de película extranjera, ha perdido en las 12 ocasiones que ha sido *nominado*.

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